Correspondence

The Chavez Journey

TO THE EDITOR: I have read with interest Leon Howell's two homilies on the visit of Cesar Chavez to the Philippines: his "Open Letter" (Sept. 19) and his piece on "Chavez for the Defense" (Nov. 14).

I met Mr. Howell for the first time in Delano, Calif. at the meeting which is the subject of his latest effort. He is a decent person with an honest and good heart and a passion for human rights who came to Delano, like many others, hoping that Cesar Chavez would stand up and "say it wasn't so." Cesar didn't say that, and Mr. Howell and his friends are very unhappy.

Mr. Howell failed to report, and apparently does not understand why Cesar Chavez went to the Philippines in the first place. Mr. Chavez is not a preacher who goes around the world speaking about human rights; he is the elected president of the union he built. He went to the Philippines because Filipino members of his union asked him to go and because he felt such a trip would help to strengthen their support within his union. From the standpoint of *that basic purpose*, his trip was a resounding success. Filipino farmworkers are not recent exiles, intellectuals or ideologues; they have been in this country since the 1920's and 1930's. They have risked everything they have to help build the United Farm Workers. They have relatives and friends in the Philippines they have never seen. They wanted *their* President to visit *their* homeland.

My own position in support of human rights in the Philippines is a matter of public record. Mr. Howell and I are agreed on that point. I wish Mr. Chavez had consulted me, Mr. Howell, the Anti-Martial Law Coalition and a host of others before he went. He did not. He consulted the members of his union, Filipino farm workers and his own board of directors. I do not know, but I suspect that his primary question was: Will this trip help make our union stronger? The evidence is that it did, and that farm workers will benefit from it.

All of this will not make Mr. Howell any happier. But then Mr. Howell does not have Cesar Chavez's job. Mr. Howell has the luxury of being able to swim freestyle in the broad sea of human rights issues. Mr. Chavez has the task of building a farm workers' union. No doubt Mr. Howell will next come out attacking Anwar Sadat's visit to Israel on the grounds that Mr. Sadat was insensitive to the human rights of the Palestinians. Fortunately, millions of desperately poor Egyptians will see things differently.

Life would be so much nicer if the "good" people were here and the "bad" people were there. But life is not like that, and that is why it is such a struggle.

JOHN R. MOYER
United Church Board for
Homeland Ministries
New York, N.Y.

REPLY:

John Moyer, whose service as president of the National Farm Workers Ministry the past two years has been much respected, helps us by providing his understanding of why Chavez went to the Philippines. The "Dear Cesar Chavez" article touched on some of those reasons and I believe it is incorrect to say that I failed to report them.

That Cesar Chavez visited the Philippines is not the issue. Rather, he went as the guest of a martial law administration opposed by, among others, significant elements in the Christiam community. President Marcos presented an award to Chavez and later the Minister of Labor for the Philippines was a special guest at the bi-annual UFW convention.

A staff member of the Christian Conference of Asia called the Chavez visit another form of American imperialism: "You Americans feel you can solve your domestic problems without regard to the international situation." He and other Asian Christians believe that the Marcos administration used Chavez, as it has many others, to try to undercut the moral authority of those church leaders who oppose martial law.

Many strong supporters of Cesar Chavez wonder if the union is worth that cost. Some have expressed their concern publicly precisely because they respect Cesar Chavez and know that his actions have wide repercussions.

Hope for Farmers

TO THE EDITOR: I compliment *C&C* for the very insightful article in the Oct. 31 issue, "The 'Free Market' Myth: Fatal Trap for Farmers." Information which clarifies the great injustice done to American farmers by government, consumers and the farmers themselves has been long overdue...

Although now a pastor, I have spent a great deal of my life involved in the inner workings of our family farm in western Nebraska. My parents and other relatives continue to farm but with rising costs and no profits, the days are numbered. Possibly through articles like this, action from sensitive church groups and other consciousness-raising endeavors, the family farm will survive in America. But it is not easy to continue hoping.

(The Rev.) D. ROYCE FITTS
Metairi, Louisiana

Ed. note: Reprints of "The 'Free Market' Myth" are available at 25¢ per copy (1-100) or 15¢ (more than 100).

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